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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 AMMAN 000268

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

PARIS PASS UNESCO OBSERVER AGGELER  
VIENNA FOR GOLDMAN  
STATE FOR NEA/RA LAWSON, NEA/ARN ZIADEH, OES/PCI PAYNE  
TEL AVIV FOR GUMBINER  
CAIRO FOR CRETZ

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [TSPL](#) [TPHY](#) [TBIO](#) [KSQA](#) [EAID](#) [SENV](#) [JO](#) [MEPN](#)

SUBJECT: SESAME--A VIRTUAL REALITY

(SBU) SUMMARY: The most significant development of the January 5-6 SESAME Interim Council Meeting in Amman was the announcement that seven countries officially requested membership in the organization, thus meeting the statutory requirement for official establishment of the SESAME project. King Abdullah and UNESCO DG Matsuura led a "virtual" groundbreaking ceremony at the site of the proposed synchrotron facility. Member state contributions and finances continued to dominate the debate and remain a sticking point for forward progress and self-sustainability. The hardest blow, though downplayed by SESAME Chair Schopper, was a less than favorable EU-commissioned review of SESAME and the EU's subsequent decision not to provide several million dollars in funding. IAEA Deputy DG Burkart also made it clear that his organization would only provide occasional training opportunities and that SESAME's greatest challenge lies in identifying means to sustain itself. Two Israeli representatives attended under heavy security but were not lightening rods for "political" remarks. On the horizon, and something likely to stir debate within the SESAME community, is Libya's recent request for observer status. END SUMMARY.

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A VIRTUAL GROUNDBREAKING  
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(SBU) The 9 th meeting of the International Interim Council of SESAME (Synchrotron Light for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East), convened in Amman January 5-6, was a mixed bag of positive and discouraging developments. On the bright side, SESAME Chairman Herwig Schopper had received in December a request from Egypt to officially become a member of the organization, bringing the total number of official member states to six and meeting the statutory requirement for the SESAME project to be officially launched. The six are Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Palestinian Authority, and Turkey. We also learned at the meeting that Israel had days earlier sent a "conditional" letter of membership, pending clarification of the contentious member contributions issue. On the margins of the meeting, the Egyptian delegates proudly talked of how Egypt had "tipped the scales" and brought SESAME to fruition. By the second day of the proceedings, and following the "groundbreaking" ceremony at which King Abdullah decorated Schopper and UNESCO DG Koichiro Matsuura, Schopper dropped the word "interim" from the council and declared SESAME officially established. Needless to say, the Jordanian government has yet to award the contract for the construction of the facility and digging will likely not begin for another several months.

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IN FOR A PENNY, IN FOR A POUND  
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(SBU) Still dogging the project, however, is its ability to become self-sustaining. With member states continuing to drag their feet on contributions, SESAME has few operating funds, let alone sufficient finances for necessary start up activities, such as upgrading the Bessy I synchrotron to the appropriate power and obtaining the necessary beamlines to conduct its work. Despite the fact that annual contributions were set at a seemingly paltry \$50,000 per member, it has not encouraged a rush to financially support SESAME. In fact, UNESCO Director of Basic and Engineering Sciences and SESAME Secretary Maciej Nalecz announced at the meeting that only Greece and the United Arab Emirates are in good standing, vis-a-vis contributions, calling this development "disturbing." The estimated 2003 budget is only \$100,000 larger than 2002, coming in at \$710,000. One of the Israeli participants confided to us that, although SESAME leadership optimistically believes \$3-5 million is necessary for annual operating costs, other experts in synchrotron light science agree that the figure is closer to \$10-15 million.

(SBU) Nalecz spoke passionately of the importance of making SESAME financially independent. He urged member states to make their contributions in a timely manner and to become stakeholders in the project. Self-sustainability is vital to SESAME's identity, Nalecz added. He also underscored that UNESCO would play the role of catalyst, and should not be viewed as an administrator or financier of SESAME. UNESCO has "no budget associated with SESAME." "We want to make very clear UNESCO will assist with networking and help with fellowships and training," Nalecz committed. Schopper chimed in with an appeal to observer states, singling out the U.S., to continue their financial support of SESAME.

(SBU) Throughout the two-day meeting, and as in previous years, debate surrounded the question of how to determine member states' financial contributions. Some favored basing annual contributions on a UN-type scale; others yet expressed their desire to revisit systems based on GDP, per capita GDP, or user community (i.e. potential number of scientists in-country), or a combination thereof. At the end of the day, it became increasingly clear that whatever system is chosen it would need to identify some upper limit; otherwise, all member states would be reluctant to make such an open-ended financial commitment to SESAME, fearing a spiraling of start-up and operating costs over the years.

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EU FUNDING NIXED  
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(SBU) The most crushing recent blow to SESAME was the announcement at the meeting that the EU, long expected to pony up about \$8 million to the project, had concluded through a techno-economic feasibility study of SESAME, commissioned by the EU, not to provide funding. Anthony Cary, Chef de Cabinet of Commissioner Patten, wrote Schopper on October 22, "In view of the substantial clarifications and revisions needed, and in the absence of firm commitments of the members of SESAME, I regret to inform you that at this stage the Commission is not in a position to provide Community funding for SESAME." "The final report makes a number of recommendations for improving of the scientific and technical analysis, for revising estimates of the likely start-up and running costs of SESAME, and for more rigorous scientific and administrative management of the project," Cary added. The EU, which normally sends an observer delegate to SESAME, was conspicuously absent from this meeting.

(SBU) Schopper, eager to downplay the EU decision and to paint as promising a future picture as possible, continuously expressed his view that the door to EU money remained open, pending SESAME meeting the "conditions" outlined in the evaluation. He called the evaluation "in principle, a very positive recommendation," adding that he didn't think the review panel fully understood the political goals of SESAME. During remarks given at the "groundbreaking," Schopper's persistent hope of securing EU money raised no small number of eyebrows among the assembled SESAME participants. These individuals were decidedly less optimistic, not publicly airing their views but sharing their concerns with one another in discussions on the margins.

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IAEA DAMPENS SESAME HOPES ALSO  
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(SBU) IAEA Deputy DG Burkart delivered a sobering wakeup call to SESAME participants when he, on the one hand, offered his agency's moral support and congratulations on the official establishment of SESAME, but clarified that the IAEA was "not into basic research" and counseled the SESAME Council to make the project self-sustaining. Burkart offered IAEA as an institution that would continue to help by contributing to training of SESAME staff; however, general funding for the project was not in the offing.

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TRAINEES MIA--A BIRD IN THE HAND . . .  
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(SBU) Yet another disappointment was the report of the Training Committee, during which the assembled SESAME participants learned that of the 21 individuals identified for staff positions at the new facility, and who had been sent to various synchrotron facilities worldwide for training, only five remain. The rest have jumped ship and have been absorbed into existing synchrotron communities. Addressing the retention problem, the Iranian delegate (and Training Committee Chair) intimated that the lack of a clear future and timeline for SESAME probably contributed to these trainees accepting positions with other facilities

and academic institutions. Twelve U.S.-bound trainees were among the SESAME prospective employees who bolted.

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ISRAELIS WELCOMED  
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(SBU) On a positive note, the two Israeli representatives made it to this meeting, albeit under heavy security provided by the Jordanian hosts. They participated fully and were generally openly welcomed by their Arab counterparts at the SESAME proceedings. When queried, one of the Israelis shared with us that they maintain excellent relations with most of the other representatives, but added that the Egyptian delegation could be difficult and cold. He further confided, "Some of our best collaboration is with the Palestinians and Iranians."

(SBU) Talking of Schopper's December visit to Israel, during which he addressed a distinguished gathering of the country's leading scientists in all fields on SESAME, the Israeli delegate said that there was significant opposition to the project. When Schopper attempted to defend SESAME by claiming the scientific research associated with it was strictly for peaceful purposes, he was challenged about the wisdom of building Arab capacity in a field that could have dual-uses. Specifically, the Israeli representative told us that several leading Israeli scientists charged that SESAME was "educating the next generation of terrorists."

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IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS  
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(SBU) Stanford University's Herman Winick reported that his institution is dismantling a synchrotron and equipment from that machine on the order of \$1 million will be available for SESAME. He is working to secure the necessary export licenses from Departments of Energy and Commerce, but sought assistance with shipping costs. A possible solution that was discussed would be to take some of the \$50,000 contribution from DOE, scheduled for April 2003, and negotiate language to use some of these funds to ship the component from Stanford to Jordan.

(SBU) According to Schopper, the American Physical Society was to approach DOE to solicit a financial contribution for the beamlines; however, this was apparently dependent upon a positive outcome of the EU evaluation and the formal establishment of SESAME, which was announced on January 6. It is now unclear if DOE would be willing to help fund the beamlines, as the EU review prompted a negative response from Brussels to assist SESAME.

(SBU) The French observer announced that France is closing down a synchrotron facility in Paris in the immediate future, and that surplus equipment--especially beamlines--would likely be available for SESAME. He counseled that SESAME should immediately identify the equipment it needs and petition the French government.

(SBU) Brazil offered three fellowships, one each to the Palestinian Authority, Jordan, and Israel, for scientists to spend a year at the Brazilian light source.

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COMMENT: NOT AS EASY AS "OPEN SESAME"  
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(SBU) The SESAME project has a long and uphill road to conquer before it becomes a viable, self-sustaining entity, and a regional "center of excellence." Simply breaking ground on the new building, and even garnering the necessary six members to formally initiate the project, does not a regional synchrotron facility make. Overcoming the financial obstacles (both start-up as well as running costs), building and training the staff, defining the users community, soliciting scientific proposals for SESAME, all add up to a heavy workload. In Schopper's own words, "the preparatory tasks seem modest compared with the challenges ahead."

GNEHM